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Testimony regarding increase of tax for historic homes on Oahu.

The recommendation to increase the tax burden on historic homes is a misguided notion. Were it in our powers, we would recommend the negation of all taxes on historic homes, as they are so rare and endangered. However, we keep the \$300.00 "tax" more as a control measure than anything else. The State inspects and controls all properties registered as historic. Often I have had inspectors show up at my door on the 2nd Saturday of the month to make sure the security gates are open for the public to view our historic home. (I need to point out the security risks this puts owners at, as we cannot control who enters, and what may occur.) In any event, we are to put our homes on display to the public as part of our designation as historic. We expose ourselves because the ethic and goal of exposure is a good thing for the people of Hawaii. We educate people about the historic architecture, the historic development, the cultural history and change over time, so that the Hawaiian citizens can have a fuller understanding of how this diverse and proud nation evolved.

There is some notion that Hawaii is a nation of grass shacks and poi. Nothing could be further from the truth, although we try to preserve anything relating to the ancient ways, Heiaus, fishponds, burial grounds, etc. As important as this, is the preservation of housing which shows the sophistication and international cultural integration of the Hawaiian nation-state. We are not a backwards, backwater with no provenance. We have a rich and diverse cultural heritage. The preservation of Historic Homes on Oahu is critically important, particularly as we develop more and more modern futuristic buildings rising upwards. The People of Hawaii need to have foundations in their lives culturally and educationally in order to have pride and esteem for themselves and their place on the planet.

Given all the above, the idea of increasing the "TAX" burden on Historic Homes is counterproductive.

Let's presume we have within the entire state 469 historic places. On Oahu we have probably 299 historic residential homes. Not a great number. Multiply that number by the \$700.00 increase and you have only put \$209,300.00 into the State's coffers. This amount would just about pay for a state conference on some subject matter. This is not enough to fund anything of significance at all.

SO WHY IS SOMEONE PROPOSING THIS?

They think they are making the burden of property taxes more equitable. Really? I think they miss the point. Equitable distribution is not the issue at all. If we used that logic, then our state parks would be taxed, our state recreation centers would be taxed. They all have structures, but we do not tax them because of the purpose they serve. It is equally true about historic housing. The purpose served outweighs the equitable pro-ration of tax.

This program is about incentives. MAKE NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT.

Think about this: We ONLY have 299 historic home on this island. Without an incentive we will lose some of them, and we can almost certainly guarantee that we will not add any other homes to the registry. The rules and regulations of Historic designation are so strict, that most people

avoid the control which the state mandates as a function of historic designation. (To build a wall or fence not only take the permit of the Building and Planning Department, the Zoning Department but can take up to 90 days for review by the Historic Preservation Department) What homeowner wants to go through that onerous process? I certainly don't, and yet I do in order to maintain the historic designation.

In fact when we tried for years to get Manoa Valley to designate itself an historic district we were soundly defeated. (Even though we have the majority of historic homes on the island) Our ethnically diverse community loathes the idea of state control.

THEIR HOME IS THEIR CASTLE. STRANGERS BEWARE!

But there is a greater goal and that is the preservation of Historic homes, which if not protected will be demolished as a factor of obsolescence. The Walker Estate in the Nuuanu was slated to be torn down and developed into a large Condominium conglomeration. Only at the last moment were we able to save it. If that disappeared, it would have removed one of the most historically significant homes on the islands.

So what do you want, a modernistic, futuristic, no nonsense, metal grid housing stock for the islands? Or do you have any compassion for the people of Hawaii who want their history preserved.

This incentive program is the only "carrot" that we can give possible candidates for historic preservation. With this increase, you are throwing away the carrot, and substituting a radish. It is somewhat a benefit, but I can assure you it is not enough to give up your freedom and rights regarding your own property.

You have to think like a homeowner, and stop playing politics with generalities. Instead of creating equitable tax distribution, you are condemning the historic provenance of the islands. It is almost like the overthrow of the Monarchy once more. No regard for Hawaii, No regard for our history, No regard for the memories and the culture which we desperately are trying to preserve.

Shame on any of you who confuse \$209,300.00 with equity. You would be selling your homeland for pennies. We laugh now at the minimal purchase price of the Louisiana Purchase made by Thomas Jefferson, and wonder how France could have sold it for such a pittance. But then that is what is proposed here. We are proposing to sell our history for a little more than \$200,000.00

Frankly I have a better idea.

Let's all have a fundraiser, and get you the \$200,000.00 and you can feel like you won, while still protecting the history of Hawaii.
I will cater the event.

Sincerely,

Robert E Fox